



North Carolina Student and Graduate Profile

At only 21 years of age, Rick Black has experienced personal challenges that might have sidetracked a less determined individual. As a student at Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) in Hickory, Rick was working his way through college, studying for a degree in information systems, going through a divorce, and raising a child. His life has since settled down a bit and today Rick enjoys being a dad and working at his first professional job. He finds himself excited about the future: “Every day, there is something new to learn in technology. My skills grow with each new experience and I look forward to utilizing all the skills I learned in the Cisco® Networking Academy® in the field.”

Rick grew up “when the Internet was just reaching broadband speeds.” He says, “I enjoyed working with computers and after taking a few basic computer classes in high school I decided that my future was in technology.” Rick enrolled at CVCC and took his first Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®) course as part of his associate’s degree program in information systems. He enjoyed the first semester so much that he decided to take all of the Networking Academy classes offered at CVCC.

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Then life became more challenging. Rick was going to school full-time, working part-time, raising a child, and going through a divorce. “Raising a child and working through a divorce were two of the largest challenges I faced while in the Networking Academy,” he acknowledges. “Despite those two challenges, I rarely missed a class and if I did, I would work extra hard to make up what I missed on my own time.” Rick persevered, and completed the Networking Academy CCNA curriculum in May 2007, then earned his CCNA certification five months later.

As a student, Rick enjoyed the lab exercises, saying, “I will admit, I hate sitting down and reading text books; but, after overcoming that challenge, the hands-on labs were my reward. Having physical routers and switches to work with was definitely a large help. Simulators are nice, but having physical equipment makes what you learn really matter. Also, physical equipment adds in that ‘unknown’ factor which introduces extra challenges.”

Rick attributes his success at the Networking Academy to his instructor, Tonya Stephens. “Tonya was the biggest factor in helping me succeed in the Networking Academy. She would stay late, meet you on her off-time, and really take time to explain the concepts to you.” Tonya, on the other hand, says “Rick is successful because he sets goals. He then applies equal parts hard work, an eagerness to learn, and a can-do attitude to achieve those goals. Rick’s diligence set him apart from his fellow students, but that diligence also inspired his classmates to work harder.”



Today, Rick works for Carolina Container Company as an IT technician. He is responsible for PC hardware repair, basic networking repair, software support, and thin client support. On occasion, he also helps other technicians configure Cisco equipment and set up Cisco wireless access points. Having acquired his CCNA certification, Rick has now established a new goal of earning his Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert (CCIE®) certification in Routing and Switching. He would also like to give back to the Networking Academy community by becoming an academy instructor at his alma mater CVCC.

Tonya supports her former student, saying “I believe Rick’s experience as an academy student will provide him with unique insights as an academy instructor. When a student hits a tough spot, Rick will be able to share his experiences as student and offer knowledgeable encouragement as well as quality instruction.”

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Tonya Stephens, Rick’s Networking Academy instructor at Catawba Valley Community College

Rick’s advice to others who may be interested in the Networking Academy is to “Work hard, study hard, and do your own research. The Networking Academy can teach you a great deal, but there is so much to learn that you have to take your own initiative to go out and learn on your own.”

Outside of technology, Rick most enjoys spending time with his daughter. When she is not with him, Rick enjoys reading and playing video games.

For more information on the Networking Academy at Catawba Valley Community College, visit: <http://cisco.cvcc.edu/>



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA
www.cisco.com
Tel: 408 526-4000
800 553-NETS (6387)
Fax: 408 527-0883

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
168 Robinson Road
#28-01 Capital Tower
Singapore 068912
www.cisco.com
Tel: +65 6317 7777
Fax: +65 6317 7799

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Haarlerbergpark
Haarlerbergweg 13-19
1101 CH Amsterdam
The Netherlands
www-europe.cisco.com
Tel: +31 0 800 020 0791
Fax: +31 0 20 357 1100

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